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Senate Republicans unveil package supporting state parks

LANSING – Michigan’s state parks would receive more funding under legislation introduced today in the Senate, Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township, announced.

The bill, which would implement an income tax return check-off for donations to the state park system, is part of the Senate Republican’s State Parks Initiative.

Other bills in the package would create an awards program recognizing a state park of the year, state park volunteer of the year and state park worker of the year. The package also would create a State Parks Advisory Committee.

“Michigan’s state parks are so wonderful and we want to recognize the hard work that goes into making the parks enticing for visitors,” said Birkholz, one of the bill sponsors. “Creating these awards and the income tax check-off will allow us to keep our parks in top condition and attract more people to get involved in the effort.”

The State Parks Advisory Committee would be in charge of helping to guide the park system. They also would select the award recipients each year. The committee will be appointed by the director of Department of Natural Resources with the advice and consent of the Natural Resources Commission.

During a morning press conference announcing the package, Birkholz also honored Friends of the Saugatuck Dunes for their dedicated service to the Saugatuck Dunes State Park.

She presented group member Art Lane, with a 2004 state park pass for the group’s volunteer efforts at Saugatuck Dunes State Park. The group will choose one member of the organization to receive the pass for their personal use.

“This group helped organize a volunteer program, designed brochures, marked trails and annually maintained the hiking trails throughout Saugatuck Dunes State Park,” Birkholz said. “We want to recognize them today and encourage other state park groups to increase their efforts at making our parks more enjoyable for every person who visits them.”

Other bill sponsors include Sens. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, and Tony Stamas, R-Midland. The bills now go to the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee for consideration.

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Comments from Sen. Birkholz on the state parks package are available for download on the Senate Majority Audiowire at www.senate.michigan.gov/gop.